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POLICY

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING COUNCIL AT ITS PREVIOUS SESSIONS

Report of the President on the outcome of the informal consultations foreseen by decision 89/20

Working methods of the Governing Council: first consultation held on 13 February 1990

Note by the President of the Governing Council

I. BACKGROUND

1. By section IV, paragraph 1 of its decision 89/20 of 30 June 1989, the Governing Council invited the President to conduct consultations with the members of the Council, observers and other interested parties, on ways to improve the working methods of the Council with a view to achieving greater efficiency, and to present the outcome to the Council at its thirty-seventh session. The Bureau of the Council decided to initiate these consultations in conjunction with the meeting of the ad hoc group on the role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the 1990s. Moreover, the President prepared, in consultation with the Bureau, a short background note to facilitate the consultations (see annex I to the present report). It was suggested that the discussion be grouped under two main headings: (a) factors inhibiting the functioning of the Council; and (b) measures to enhance the functioning of the Council. Under each of these headings, the President raised a series of questions and invited delegations to address them, indicating that they were free to add any other questions they deemed appropriate (see annex II to the present report).

2. It was recalled that Governing Council decision 89/20 focused on the working methods of the Council. The review of the Committee of the Whole, as foreseen by decision 87/20 of 19 June 1987, and of its Working Group, in pursuance of decision 89/25 of 30 June 1989, would be considered by the Council at its thirty-seventh session. It was therefore suggested that delegations might also wish to address questions relating to that matter.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The informal consultations afforded delegations an opportunity to exchange views on a wide range of issues related to the functioning of the Governing Council. They also provided an occasion to present new ideas which could be explored further in subsequent consultations. The President invited delegations to submit their ideas in writing to the secretariat of the Council for eventual distribution to members, observers and other interested parties.

4. Some delegations pointed out that governance involved not only the functioning of the Governing Council, but also its relationship with the Administrator and the senior management of UNDP. Reference was also made to the UNDP management study, which had been distributed informally. In that context, and in response to questions raised, the Associate Administrator reconfirmed that no changes would be made in the senior management structure of UNDP until the Council had reviewed the question at its thirty-seventh session.

III. OVERALL FUNCTIONING OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

5. A number of delegations expressed the view that it was desirable to improve the functioning of the Governing Council. Reference was made to the need for the Council to focus on its overall responsibility of ensuring that UNDP employed its resources with maximum efficiency and effectiveness in assisting developing countries, rather than becoming involved in operational and technical details.

6. Some delegations referred to the relationship between the overall functioning of the Governing Council and the administrative and programme support budget of $1.3 billion required to manage a field programme exceeding $4 billion. They pointed out that it might be difficult to avoid in-depth reviews of a number of items, which would increase the volume of items on the agenda and thus the duration of the Council sessions. Any reduction in the agenda and shortening of the Council sessions should take into account the special characteristics of the Programme. Reference was also made to the need for new members of the Council to have sufficient time to acquire an in-depth understanding of all issues being considered by the Council.

7. Some concern was expressed regarding the overall cost of the governance of UNDP. In reply to questions raised, the Administrator suggested that it might be desirable for the Governing Council to review the time and resources used at present in the governance of UNDP in order to achieve a more efficient use of management resources.

8. It was pointed out that the review of the governance was an ongoing process, which the Governing Council had considered on various occasions. Some delegations pointed out that such reviews should include the venue, including the costs involved.

IV. FACTORS THAT MIGHT INHIBIT THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COUNCIL

9. A number of factors which might inhibit the functioning of the Governing Council were identified by delegations, including the following:

(a) The crowded agenda;

(b) Detailed consideration of items which may not always require policy guidance;

(c) Long duration of Council sessions;

(d) Volume and lateness of documentation;

(e) Insufficient number of informal briefings;

(f) Excessive number of decisions covering the same subjects over a number of years;

(g) The holding of more than two simultaneous meetings, contrary to Council decisions;

(h) Informal meetings without interpretation.

10. The Secretary of the Governing Council recalled that the Council had undertaken a major review of the subject in 1981, leading to decision 81/37 of 27 June 1981. In subsequent years, the Council had adopted additional decisions designed to streamline and rationalize its work. Unfortunately, some of those decisions had not been fully implemented. It was suggested that it might be useful to review past decisions to ensure a better functioning of the Council (see annex I, appendix). The view was shared by a number of delegations. The secretariat of the Council was invited to prepare a note which would review and analyse the implementation of Council decisions on the matter. The Associate Administrator indicated that such a note would be prepared in time for future consultations.

V. ELEMENTS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

11. A number of ideas to enhance the functioning of the Governing Council were presented during the informal consultations.

12. It was pointed out by some delegations that it might be desirable for Governments to consider reducing the size of the agenda, including the

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biennialization of certain items. It was also noted that some items could be combined. Any measures on the agenda would require action by the Governing Council itself, but due consideration should be given to ensure in-depth consideration of major issues.

13. The Administration could propose steps to reduce documentation, such as combining certain documents on similar subjects. The view was also expressed by a number of delegations that renewed efforts should be made to produce more concise documents, perhaps in the form of executive summaries, and to ensure their timely distribution. It was also suggested that the Bureau should filter all decisions to ensure that an excessive number of reports would not be called for. The possibility was also raised of presenting oral reports which could be supplemented by brief documentation.

14. Some delegations indicated that it might be possible to reduce the duration of the regular sessions of the Governing Council by referring specific agenda items to subsidiary organs which could meet both sessionally and inter-sessionally. In that connection, a proposal was made to consider the establishment of a programme committee with carefully delineated terms of reference, including the evaluation of UNDP activities. The proposed committee would replace the Committee of the Whole and its Working Group, and its recommendations would be submitted to the plenary for action.

15. It was pointed out by several delegations that any newly proposed subsidiary organ should include the entire membership of the Governing Council. Other delegations pointed out that they favoured a smaller body, on which all regional groups would be represented, and which would consider operational and technical issues.

16. Several delegations noted the usefulness of informal consultations on some operational and technical issues. Other delegations pointed out that such informal consultations should not lead to actions being taken without prior decisions from the Governing Council.

17. Some delegations expressed concern with respect to the cost of attendance at inter-sessional meetings. They pointed out that UNDP matters were followed by officials from their capitals, whose attendance at inter-sessional meetings could create serious financial difficulties.

18. The merits of informal consultations were emphasized by several delegations. The desire was also expressed to have more communication between the Governing Council and the Administrator. It was suggested that informal consultations should be held through regional group meetings, through the Bureau of the Council, as well as on the basis of informal working groups. It was reiterated that the results of informal consultations should not lead to action by the Administration unless endorsed by the Council.

19. Views were expressed on the high-level policy segment of the Governing Council. Some delegations indicated that it might be desirable to select a particular subject only every second or third year. Other delegations pointed out

that the presence of high-level government officials was very useful, not only for the formal deliberations of the Council but also for maintaining informal working contacts. It was considered desirable to ensure that the policy debate focused on key questions before the Council.

20. It was noted by some delegations that, by its very nature, the work of the Governing Council had to be slow, in order to afford all delegations an opportunity to express their views and to provide sufficient time to reach a consensus that takes into account the interest of all members.

21. Some delegations stressed the need to separate consideration of the working methods of the Governing Council from the broader issues of governance. Decision 89/20 had foreseen only a review of the working methods of the Council.

22. The subject of evaluation of UNDP field programmes by Governing Council members was raised. The field visits by members were viewed as a useful mechanism, which might be strengthened by providing appropriate resources to permit developing countries to participate. Moreover, means should be found to communicate the results of those visits to the Council.

23. It was suggested that any proposals on the functioning of the Governing Council should take into account the work-load on the Administration, as well as their overall cost-effectiveness.

24. Concerning the decision-making process of the Governing Council, it was suggested that the practice of other bodies with respect to deadlines for the submission of draft decisions might be adopted. It was also recalled by one delegate that he had recommended to the Council at its thirty-sixth session that the secretariat should include draft decisions in documents dealing with non-controversial subjects.

Annex I

NOTES TO FACILITATE CONSULTATIONS ON THE WORKING METHODS OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

(First consultation: 13 February 1990)

1. This informal note of the President of the Governing Council, prepared in consultation with the Bureau of the Council, is intended to initiate the consultations called for in section IV, paragraph 1, of Council decision 89/20 of 30 June 1989. That decision invites the President to conduct consultations with the members of the Council, observers and other interested parties, on ways to improve the working methods of the Council with a view to achieving greater efficiency, and to present the outcome to the Governing Council at its thirty-seventh session.

2. It should be recalled that, by section I of its decision 87/20 of 19 June 1987, the Governing Council decided to review the Committee of the Whole at its thirty-seventh session. This item will therefore be presented to the Council for consideration at the forthcoming session.

3. Moreover, in its decision 89/25 of 30 June 1989, the Governing Council decided to extend the Working Group of the Committee of the Whole, on an experimental basis, until June 1990. The same decision expands the membership of the Working Group to include all members of the Governing Council and opens the Group to the participation of all members of the Programme.

4. In considering this subject, delegations may also wish to bear in mind the relevant sections of the submission to the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council, contained in decision 87/50 of 19 June 1987 of the Governing Council. The Governing Council also took important steps in its decision 81/37 of 27 June 1981 on the streamlining and rationalization of its work. (A selective list of decisions of the Council on efforts to increase its effectiveness is provided in the appendix below.)

5. In view of the complexities of improving the working methods of the Governing Council, it may be necessary to foresee several informal meetings before the Council is in a position to reach a decision on the matter by June 1990. In order to initiate this process, delegations may wish to consider the subject under two headings: (a) factors inhibiting the effectiveness of the Council; and (b) measures to enhance the functioning of the Council.

Appendix

SELECTIVE LIST OF DECISIONS OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL ON EFFORTS TO INCREASE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Decision number	Title
89/25	Working Group of the Committee of the Whole
89/20, section IV	Consultation process (the role of UNDP in the 1990s)
89/18	Conference facilities and documentation
87/51	Measures concerning documentation for the Governing Council
87/50	Submission to the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the in-depth study of the United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions in the economic and social fields
87/20	Review of the Committee of the Whole and its Working Group
87/1	Schedule of meetings of the Governing Council in 1987 and the biennialization of documentation
86/3	Terms of office of members of the Governing Council
86/1	Arrangements for the Working Group of the Committee of the Whole
85/45	Measures to be taken concerning the documentation of the Governing Council
85/17	Programming (establishment of the Working Group of the Committee of the Whole)
83/40	Measures to be taken concerning the documentation of the Governing Council
83/5, section III	Other matters that might facilitate the implementation of the measures for the longer-term financing of the United Nations Development Programme, including, in particular, options and recommendations for strengthening the effectiveness of the work of the Governing Council
81/37	Streamlining and rationalization of the work of the Governing Council

Annex II

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME ON WAYS TO IMPROVE THE WORKING METHODS OF THE COUNCIL

(First consultation: 13 February 1990)

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

As agreed yesterday, we will deal today with questions relating to the working methods of the Governing Council. In its decision 89/20, section IV, paragraph 1, the Council invited the President to conduct consultations on this subject and to present the outcome to the Council at its session next June.

In the invitation to this meeting, I took the liberty of drawing the attention of delegations to my closing statement at the thirty-sixth session, contained in summary form in the summary record of the thirty-ninth meeting of the Council session of last year (DP/1989/SR.39). Moreover, in consultation with the Bureau of the Council I prepared a very short note, which has been distributed. The note provides some background and suggests a manner in which we might proceed today.

As concerns the background, you will note that reference is made to two other decisions of the Council which require consideration by the Council next June. By decision 87/20, the Council decided to review the Committee of the Whole next June. Decision 89/25 extended, on an experimental basis, the Working Group of the Committee of the Whole until June 1990. Delegations may bear in mind these two decisions in the course of the various consultations we may have on these questions prior to and during the next session of the Council. The note also refers to other past decisions of the Council, notably decision 87/50.

As a means of facilitating our work today, it is suggested that we group our discussion under two main headings: (a) factors inhibiting the effectiveness of the Council; and (b) measures to enhance the functioning of the Council.

In order to further facilitate our consultations, I should like to propose a series of questions under each of the two headings. In dealing with the issues under the two headings, delegations may wish to address these questions. Of course, delegations are free to add any other questions they deem appropriate.

Under factors inhibiting the effectiveness of the Council, I should like to suggest the following questions.

- In view of the considerable agenda of the Council, is the work-load of plenary and its subsidiary organs (the Budgetary and Finance Committee, the Drafting Group and the Committee of the Whole) too crowded?

- Is plenary dealing with items that do not require policy guidance and which could best be referred to a subsidiary body? Could technical and operational matters raised in plenary be better handled informally, or in a subsidiary organ?

- Is the duration of the regular session of four weeks too long?

- Is the total number of meetings and the concurrent scheduling of meetings (sometimes without interpretation facilities) an area of difficulty?

- Are delegations receiving sufficient briefings by the UNDP administration prior to consideration of questions in regular sessions?

- Is the volume and lateness of documents a problem? What steps could be taken to reduce the number of documents? Could further biennialization of items be considered, as practised for funds and programmes in accordance with Council decision 87/1 of 17 February 1987? Could items be combined into one document (programme implementation, project matters, etc.)?

As concerns measures to enhance the functioning of the Council, the following questions may be borne in mind:

- Could the duration of the Council be shortened by referring more agenda items to subsidiary organs, meeting both sessionally and inter-sessionally?

- Would it be desirable to replace the Committee of the Whole and its Working Group by a subsidiary organ, meeting sessionally and inter-sessionally, which would deal with operational and technical programme matters, thus relieving plenary of this task and making the drafting group superfluous?

- Assuming that a subsidiary organ open to all members, observers and interested parties could deal with technical and operational matters and that the Budgetary and Finance Committee would continue to deal with administrative and financial matters, should the plenary confine its work to a high policy segment (possibly at the start of the session) and the consideration of the reports and recommendations/draft decisions by the Budgetary and Finance Committee and any other subsidiary organ?

- Would the Council's work be enhanced by having about two inter-sessional meetings of subsidiary organs (Budgetary and Finance Committee and any other organ that might be established to deal with programme matters)?

- Would various types of informal consultations, including government consultations under the chairmanship of the President, consultations between the Administrator and the Bureau, and consultations between the administration and the Council, be helpful in improving the functioning of the Council?

These questions are posed to initiate our informal consultations, and I welcome any comments delegations may have on my statement.

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Note by the President of the Governing Council

Addendum

I. BACKGROUND

1. As indicated in paragraph 10 of the note by the President on the outcome of the consultations held on 13 February (DP/1990/82), the secretariat of the Governing Council was invited to prepare a note which would review and analyse decisions designed to ensure a better functioning of the Council, starting with decision 81/37 of 27 June 1981. The relevant decisions are listed in the appendix to annex I of document DP/1990/82.

2. For the sake of brevity, the present note focuses on specific aspects of working methods dealt with by previous decisions which have not been fully implemented and which merit further consideration by the Governing Council. Also offered are a few additional practical suggestions in the light of the secretariat's experience over the past decade.

II. DURATION AND NUMBER OF MEETINGS

3. In paragraph 7 of the annex to decision 87/50 of 18 June 1987, the Governing Council noted that while General Assembly resolution 32/71 of 9 December 1977 had authorized the Council to hold one regular session annually (as compared to two sessions up to that time), the actual time spent on meetings had remained seven weeks. Since 1987, even more time has been spent on meetings, with the addition in 1989 and 1990 of a series of informal consultations needing full interpretation and other services. Moreover, by decision 90/4 on the preparation for the fifth programming cycle, the Council decided to convene informal consultations on this matter with interpretation services, although the secretariat had brought to the notice of the Council the requirements in this regard (i.e., a statement of programme and budget implications, inclusion in the official calendar of meetings and the establishment of entitlements for conference services by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council).

4. The note of the President already refers to the burden the increased number of meetings places on delegations and the UNDP Administration. The Governing Council may therefore wish to consider once again whether it is possible to reduce the number and duration of meetings, without in any way relinquishing its important policy functions.

5. To achieve this, this Governing Council may have to revert to the idea of a single, regular session, thus limiting the scheduling of special sessions in February and other inter-sessional meetings throughout the year. As foreseen by decisions 81/37 and 83/5, a brief meeting could be scheduled prior to the regular session to consider country programmes and special items. Greater use could be made throughout the year of informal consultations with members of the Council convened by the Administrator in accordance with paragraph 3 (n) of decision 81/37.

6. The Governing Council might wish to adopt the practice of establishing, through the Committee of Conferences, a full calendar of meetings for the year for the eventual appropriation of resources by the General Assembly. For the various types of inter-sessional meetings which cannot be included in the calendar of meetings, consideration might be given for UNDP to establish a small multi-purpose conference room with portable interpretation facilities. UNDP could also be permitted to obtain interpreters on a contractual basis whenever United Nations conference services are not in a position to provide such services. Such a conference room could also be used for training, staff meetings and related purposes, thus making it more cost-effective. As a first step, should the Council so wish, the Administrator could provide an estimate of the costs involved.

III. MATTERS RELATED TO THE AGENDA

7. Based on paragraph 3 (e) of its decision 81/37, the Governing Council has adopted a structure for its agenda which has proved to be very helpful for the orderly conduct of Council business. However, one issue which could perhaps be handled more efficiently is the question of the policy review during the high-level segment. The Council needs to decide how best to attract senior policy makers in

order to give the Council a more dynamic role on emerging major policy issues under its control (see 81/37, paras. 1-3). The organizational meeting of the preceding year should be used to initiate a process of deciding whether to hold a high-level discussion on a special topic. An appropriate subject could then be adopted by the Council at its regular session in June.

8. Further progress could be made in the biennialization of funds and programmes under the supervision of the Governing Council. This subject was dealt with in paragraph 3 (f) of decision 81/37 and paragraph 1 of annex A of decision 87/1. Unfortunately the Council has not been able to adhere to these decisions, as recent agendas reveal. For example, 1990 is an off-year for the United Nations Fund for Science and Technology for Development (UNFSTD) and the United Nations Revolving Fund for Natural Resources Exploration (UNRFNRE); none the less, full reports are required on the future of these funds (agenda items 8 (c) and (d)). The same pattern has occurred in previous years.

9. The Governing Council may wish to consider whether annually recurring items could be reviewed biennally. For example, items on this year's agenda which fall into this category, except for the Annual Report of the Administrator and the annual review of the financial situation, are: non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grass-roots organizations, women in development, procurement from developing countries, assistance to national liberation movements (NLMs), implementation of selected country programmes, the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations system regular and extrabudgetary expenditures. The Council may wish to select some of these subjects for in-depth review every second year.

IV. DECISIONS

10. A question raised during the consultations on 13 February 1990, and which has also been the subject of previous consideration by the Governing Council, is the limitation on the number and length of decisions. The Council may wish to consider the following:

(a) An effort should be made to reduce the number of decisions elaborated by the Drafting Group and the Budgetary and Finance Committee to those containing specific policy direction and requests for action on the part of the Administrator; items on which no specific action is required could be taken note of in plenary, as is the case already for a few items;

(b) To the maximum extent possible, decisions on similar topics should be combined;

(c) No decision should contain more than one preambular paragraph.

V. DOCUMENTATION

11. A continuing concern of the Governing Council, as reflected in numerous decisions, is the timely distribution of documentation. While in overall terms, the average number of pages per report has declined over the past decade (as a result of measures taken by the secretariat, including issuing some background information in English only and by the use of contractual translations), the increase in the number of reports being requested in decisions of the Governing Council does pose a problem. A suggestion was made during the informal consultations on 13 February 1990 that the Bureau of the Council could review all requests for reports during the thirty-seventh session with a view to reducing the number of reports requested and to scheduling reports in a more staggered manner.

12. The Governing Council may wish to consider the following additional steps:

(a) Documents which are submitted for the information of the Council could be distributed officially in the languages in summary form, not to exceed five pages, with the remaining information provided in English only, as background;

(b) The biennialization called for by former decisions of the Council could be more fully implemented, as mentioned in paragraph 9. This would lead to a reduction in the documentation on funds and programmes under the supervision of the Council;

(c) The reintroduction of the ideas contained in paragraphs 2 to 4 of annex B of decision 87/1, which established a system of grouping various items foreseen under an agenda item into a single report. This could involve three reports, as follows:

(i) Annual review of programme and project activities (e.g., for 1990, the reports on the implementation of country programmes, now foreseen as four separate reports under agenda item 5 (b) could have been incorporated into appropriate sections of the annual report of the Administrator. This idea was raised in the informal consultation on 13 February 1990);

(ii) Annual review of thematic programmes established by the Council (in 1990, this could have included NGOs and grass-roots organizations, and women in development);

(iii) Implementation of the programming cycle and other resource utilization;

(d) Decision 81/37 initiated a system of indicative quotas dividing documentation into policy, support and country programme documents. While experience with indicative quota systems has not always been encouraging, it might be useful to test this approach once again by setting a firm quota for 1991. The Bureau of the Council may be charged with monitoring this process throughout the year;

(e) An even greater effort to produce concise, factual and action-oriented reports will have to be made.